INSPIRATION DESTINATIONS PLACES TO STAY NEWS & ADVICE HOT LIST SHOPPING CRUISE WOMEN WHO TRAVEL VIDEO

ravele



NORTH AMERICA > UNITED STATES > MAINE



DESTINATIONS

The Small Maine Town That's Giving Portland a Run for Its Money

The former mill town of Biddeford, Maine is attracting a wave of creatives, and the result is a slew of new restaurants, hotels, and wine bars worth detouring for.

> **BY ALEXANDRA HALL** May 9, 2022

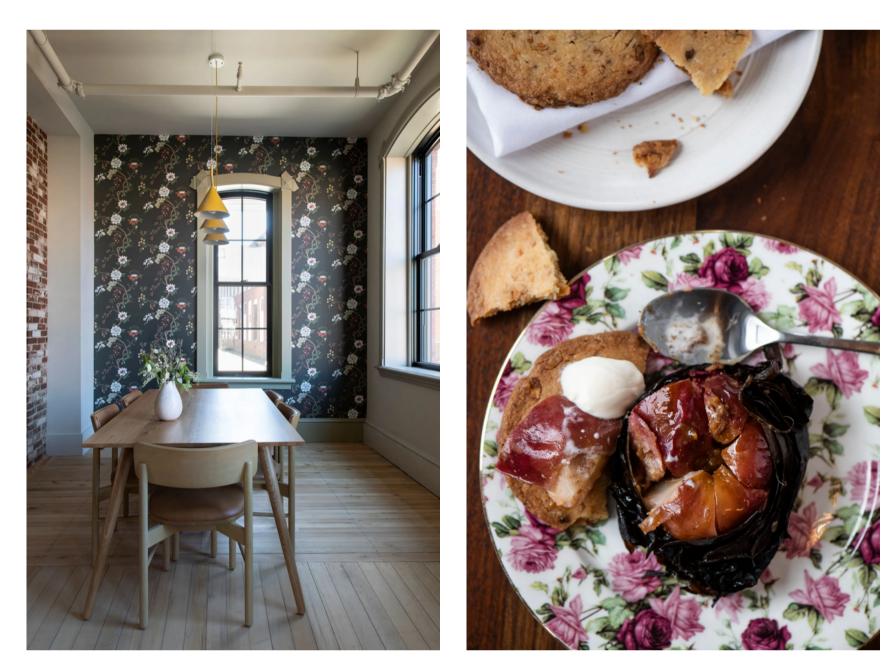
All listings featured in this story are independently selected by our editors. However, when you book something through our retail links, we may earn an affiliate commission.

Every year, a crush of humanity arrives in Maine for one of three things: the ocean, lakes, or mountains. Biddeford's downtown area, full of former textile mills that sat quiet for decades until recently, has none of the above. What it now has, instead, is oceans of talent and mountains of collaboration—a swell of creative energy that's beginning to rival the allure of **Portland**, as well as Maine's other seasonally congested coastalfront towns.



Biddeford is rapidly becoming an updated model for how to take a negativedefunct former mills, in this case—and transform them, into not just nice shops and restaurants, but concepts that are cerebral and infectious. Think affordable incubators for culinary creatives, visual artists, and plant-based fashion designers; art-centric hotels in what was once a hotel desert; and innovations by aquaculture and agriculture visionaries.

"There's a very chicken-and-egg effect here," says Don Lindgren, owner of Rabelais, which sells (by appointment) one of the finest collections of rare cookbooks in the country. "Talented people are bringing other talented people, and they meet up and hash out ideas for other new businesses, and then that attracts even more talent."





The floral interior of Elda, a fine dining spot in Biddeford, Maine Joan Pamboukes

An apple roasted in sugar kelp with cream and warm sunchoke cookies, served at Elda Nicole Wolf

Those meet-ups go down at spots across the 35-acre mill district—places like Elements, which arguably kick-started the town's creative resurgence when it opened nearly a decade ago, offering the winning combination of book clubs, terrific pastries, their own micro-roasted coffee, and beer from **Banded Brewing** Company. The latter also proffers brews and snacks—the jalapeño grilled cheese is heavenly—in its tasting room in the Pepperell Mill, just next to Round Turn Distilling, home to cocktails laced with citrusy, house-made Bimini gin.

There's plenty of brainstorming happening over sustainably grown vino at Lorne Wine-part community hangout, part bar and wine shop-which partners with Rabelais on regular events. Almost everyone lines up at The Palace Diner (another early pioneer of "The Biddaissance," as locals call it) for Greg Mitchell and Chad Conley's outstanding spin on vintage comfort food slung in an equally vintage dining car.

A latte at Time & Tide Coffee in Biddeford Julie K. Gray; Hannah Hirsch

Freshly roasted coffee at Time & Tide Coffee Julie K. Gray

"When we first came here five years ago, we were incredibly impressed by all the people paying serious attention to the artistry of what they're making," says chef Bowman Brown. He and his wife Anna own Elda, their fine dining gem that's reaped national adoration (including a recent James Beard nomination). "That sensibility made me feel like I was in the right place."

Since then the couple has opened Jackrabbit Cafe, where they're doling out astonishingly good Scandinavian pastry using heritage grains, and serving joe from nearby Time & Tide Coffee. "They're the roasting experts," says Anna. "Likewise, if people come in before their table is ready, we send them across the street to Lorne Wine. Each business has its own part to play in town."

And more of those parts keep emerging—à la brothers' Ian and Travis Kern's Maine-focused cheese shop, Nibblesford, soon be joined be the likes of Fish & Whistle, a fish 'n chips spot helmed by Kate Hamm (pastry chef at Portland's rising culinary star, Leeward) and husband Jason Eckerson (of Portland's Eventide).

Kelp farmer Justin Papkee's lobster boat harvesting kelp in Casco Bay New England Ocean Cluster

Of course, any creativity is boosted by having space in which to create. "Biddeford was a working town with massive production capacity," reminds Lindgrun. "Some of that's gone, but there are millions of square feet in mills being used again to make incredible things." Witness the artisanal pastas from Four Star Fresh; or fashion designer Roxi Suger's plant-based knits, angelrox. Last year the regenerative kelp aquaculture company Atlantic Sea Farms moved its entire operation into a 27,000-square-foot facility. And Portland's Big Tree Grocery Hospitality—the restaurant group behind Hugo's, The Honey Paw, and Eventide in Portland—has gotten into the act, moving its food production and meal kits business here. "Everyone here's excited about what everyone else is doing," says events director Caroline Bergin.



Case in point: A new Sweet Cream location opening on Main Street this summer, where husband and wife team Jon Denton and Jacqui DeFranca scoop ice cream they make with ingredients from local farms. When it comes to inventing flavors, they often look no further than their neighboring businesses, working with them to create and name new ones.

"We did a black sesame with Bowman at Elda, and a butter cookie ice cream with Reilly's Bakery," says DeFranca. "Biddeford's such a world of ideas and energy, why not use our community as inspiration?"

Plan your visit

Soon folks will be hobnobbing at The Lincoln Hotel, opening in the former Lincoln Mill this August with a rooftop pool, a tiki bar, an outpost of Batson River Brewing & Distilling—and the property will play host to pop-up galleries introducing new artists and makers. For a longstanding gem that attracts locals and visitors alike, opt for The Tides Beach Club located just beyond the Biddeford town line in neighboring Kennebunkport.

	TOPICS FO	DOD								
RECOMMENDED										
The Wanderer Cottages			The Press Hotel, Autograph Collection							
Designed to look like the high-end surf camps of the 70's.			The former home of Maine's biggest							
			newspaper transformed into a beautiful boutique hotel downtown.							
READ FULL REVIE	V		READ FULL REVIEW							
		VIEW ALL NORTH AMERICA								

North America Travel Guide

Our most nopula	r newsletter for destination inspiration, travel tips, trip itineraries,
	g else you need to be an expert traveler in this beautiful world
	SIGN UP
	SIGN UP

MORE FROM CONDÉ NAST TRAVELER

Where to Go for Labor Day Weekend to Avoid the Crowds **BY CHARLIE HOBBS**

The 26 Best Restaurants in Orleans, From Comfort Food Classics to Locally-Caught

United States 🗸



Condé Nast)r					MORE FROM	CONDÉ NAST T	RAVELER	CONTA	ст
II AVGIU						ABOUT CONDÉ NA SUBSCRIBE NEWSLETTER SIG			CONTACT CAREERS	THE EDITORS
р f	*	Ó	Y							
	s not intended	as a substitute		or treatment. Any informatio and you should not take any						
RSS FEEDS S	ITE MAP ACC	ESSIBILITY HEL	P CONDÉ NAST STOR	RE CONDÉ NAST SPOTLIGHT	DO NOT SELL MY PERSO	NAL INFO				

© 2022 Condé Nast. All rights reserved. Use of this site constitutes acceptance of our User Agreement and Privacy Policy and Cookie Statement and Your California Privacy Rights. Condé Nast Traveler may earn a portion of sales from products that are purchased through our site as part of our Affiliate Partnerships with retailers. The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Condé Nast. <u>Ad Choices</u>